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There are many ways to get rid of a husband. My way cost only a hundred a week...



Devil Eyes

BY JACK RITCHIE

FRED SAYS that a hundred a week is cheap enough and I guess that's one good way of looking at it.

Not that he could ever prove anything. There's nothing to show I hired him, and I didn't really.

Maybe I should stop paying, but I can't take any chances. You can never tell about those winos. And besides, it's Fay's money anyway.

I try not to let it bother me. Instead, I like to think about the two Jaguars, the forty suits I have

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at the Bermuda place alone, and about Fay's money.

And Fay, too, of course.

It was a real good deal, meeting her. I remember I was moody and depressed at the time. Mr. Bronson's detectives had me jumpy, following me that way, and I'd just phoned Mrs. Bronson and told her the whole thing was off.

I was kicking myself for not saving money for times like this when I saw Fay. She had shimmering black hair and devil dark eyes that were a flat invitation. I felt suddenly happier as I made my way through the cocktail crowd.

A real bitch, I thought, as our eyes came closer. But I wasn't complaining.

She arched an eyebrow as she smiled. "Mr. Philip Gillespie, isn't it? I've heard about you somewhere."

I returned the smile. "Some people are shocked. And others interested."

"I'm horrified," she said. "Absolutely shivering."

I touched her arm. "Tell me about it. No harm in that."

"Of course not," she said.

And that's the way it went, right from the start. We both knew what we wanted and we didn't waste time asking questions.

She let me know that her husband, Charley Whittier, was down someplace on the coast of Georgia looking over a new yacht, and that took care of that.

I took her to my apartment after the party and it was fine. It was fine that night and all the other nights. Even when Charley came back we didn't let that stop us.

Fay had a firm white body rounded so soft that you couldn't keep your hands off it. I used to wonder why Charley took so many trips until I made it my business to see what he looked like.

He was the type that always walked with his shoulders back and took in a lot of fresh air. But he'd been breathing the stuff for sixty-five years and now he got his kicks fishing for tarpon.

In two weeks I had a new car and I re-opened my bank account. The sun was shining for me and I could see that the setup could go on for a long time.

Just how long Fay had in mind I found out one evening as we lay there.

First she moved a lock of my hair away from my forehead. "I know you're no damn good," she said.

"Oh?" I said. "A fine time to start complaining."

"What I mean is that you're a complete rotten heel."

I reached for the cigarettes on the night stand. "What brought up the insults?"

Fay accepted the cigarette and a light. "I just thought you ought to know that you're not fooling me. And then, too, there's the terrible fact that I love you."

I tried to blow smoke rings. "I love you too. It's a maddening, soul-searing love."

"My dear Phil," she said. "You don't love anyone but yourself. There's your soul-searing love."

I looked back up at the ceiling and kept quiet.

"I suppose I could get a divorce," she said. "But you wouldn't like that. I probably couldn't get enough money out of Charley to satisfy you."

I was glad to see that she was being sensible. So many of them get the divorce idea without thinking about money. That's when I put on my hat and go for the door.

"And yet I'm stupid enough to love a rat like you," she said. "I like to have you around."

I met her eyes. *I'll be damned*, I thought. *She really does*.

I brushed my lips lightly over her eyelids. "Relax I'm around now."

"Sure," she said. "As long as Charley pays the freight and doesn't know what's going on."

She was quiet for a while and then she said, "I've been thinking about something else. I'd have money then."

I was interested. "And that?"

Fay watched me with thoughtful eyes. "Suppose we killed my husband."

I sat up and brushed the sparks from my chest. "Get that idea out of your head fast."

She smiled faintly. "It could look like an accident."

"I've heard that one before. Think about something else, baby. You're making me nervous."

Charley came back from another one of his healthy trips and I saw her only twice in the next week. Both times we nearly got into arguments because she kept harping on the accident subject.

I guess that's why I hit the bottle too hard that night when she had to go some place with Charley.

Ordinarily I go easy on the wet stuff because I know I can't handle it. But Fay had me worried with her talk and I could see a good thing coming to an end.

The drinks stacked up inside of me and by the time I was having trouble telling up from down, I was in the Third Ward.

I had a palm against a building to keep me from falling and was wondering where the hell all the taxis were.

That's when I met Fred.

He was a little sniffing man with frightened shoulders and he eyed me from the doorway of a closed grocery store.

"Keep moving, Bo," I snapped at him. "I'm not going to pass out."

He passed a grimy hand over his nose. "I wasn't gonna roll you, Mister."

He watched me, ready to move on if I came closer. "Mister," he said. "I ain't had a thing to eat in days."

"You make me cry," I said, after a hiccup. "Starve somewhere else."

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My hand slipped on the wall and I almost fell.

I closed my eyes for what I thought was a second, but it must have been longer. He was near enough to grab when I opened them.

I got him by the shirt front, but he was a wiry little bastard and he twisted away before I could throw a punch.

He scuttled twenty feet before he turned and snarled. "You rich slobs think you can push everybody around."

I considered going after him, but it seemed like work. He stood there hating me and then the liquor inside me began to talk.

"What'll you do for a couple of bucks?" I asked. "Anything?"

He stared at me, hope flicking in his eyes.

I fumbled for my wallet and took out two hundreds. "Pretty, aren't they, bending in the wind that way?"

His eyes fondled the money and automatically he cleaned the tips of his right hand on his pant's leg.

I found another hundred and fanned myself with the three bills. "Would you kill for three hundred? That's a lot of bottles."

His tongue wet his lips and I stood there grinning at the way he leaned for the money.

His eyes began thinking for his head and he looked at me. "What's his name?"

I should have stopped right there and put the money back in my wallet. But I was rolling and I pushed it further. "A real important man," I said. "Charley Whittier."

A taxi pulled around the corner then and I took my eyes away from him as I flagged it.

A second too late I felt the tug as he jerked the hundreds from my fingers. He slipped into an alley before I could even remember to curse.

That's how I met Fred.

Charley Whittier took off again, this time for Kentucky to look over some horses, and I took Fay to dinner after his plane left.

She started talking about it right away.

"I hired a man today," she said.

"Yes?" I said. I was enjoying the steak and wasn't paying much attention. "Somebody quit at your place?"

"Not a servant," she said sharply. "He's going to do what you're afraid to do."

I stopped eating. "What do you mean?"

Her words were clear and should have been whispered. "I hired a man to kill my husband."

She said it just like that. Real cold-blooded.

I put down my knife and fork and glanced around the room. I was pretty sure no one else had heard her, but I still didn't feel calm. "You're crazy," I said.

"Yes," she said. "You make me that way."

"You couldn't get away with it. Call it off."

She looked down at the tablecloth. "No."

I pushed my chair away from the table. Fay put her hand on my arm. "He'll make it look like an accident."

I shook my head. "Too many things can go wrong."

"It's the only way for us," Fay said. "I don't want you only part time."

I got up. "Part time is better than no time, baby."

She saw I meant it. "All right, Phil," she said slowly. "I'll call it off."

Charley came back from Kentucky with two yearlings. But he never did get a chance to see them race.

The day after he returned I picked up the paper to read about how he died.

It seems that Charley made a habit of taking walks in the evening. Usually he went to a lonely point where his estate faced the ocean.

It was here that he must have slipped, the papers said, and fallen down the steep palisades to the rocks below. There were no witnesses to the accident.

I kept away from Fay for two weeks and spent the time sweating over every item the papers carried about Charley's death.

The whole thing passed without making a smell. The death was ruled accidental.

I decided it would be all right to see Fay again.

She had her hand on her hip when I came. "Well," she said. "That was a nice long decent interval. How good to see you again."

"I'm glad you had sense enough not to phone me," I said. "You can never tell about wire tapping."

Her black eyes met mine. "What are you talking about?"

"As long as it's over, honey," I said, "we can forget about it." I watched the tightness of her dress and the way she moved. "I missed you a lot, baby."

She didn't quite believe me, but she came to me. Later I thought I might as well ask the question.

"Was it an accident?"

She ran a hand along my cheek. "Of course it was an accident."

"That's the way we'll think of it," I said. Then I smiled before I kissed her.

Fred came to see me a few days later.

He hadn't used any of the three hundred to help the outside of him and he smelled of dampness.

"You got a peculiar kind of guts," I said. "You steal from me and then you come up for a touch."

He trembled with hangover uneasiness. "You can't say I stole it," he said, his voice a whining flutter. "You remember, don't you?"

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hands. "What the hell do you mean?"

He gained a faint confidence. "You read the papers, don't you? Like about the accident to Mr. Whittier."

"And you claim what?"

His face got wise. "I don't claim nothing. I just say I didn't steal the money. Get me?"

He tried a snaggle-tooth grin. "I had a hard time finding you. I sure could use another hundred."

He was a little man whose life was the warm sleep made by wine. It would be his word against mine, if he ever talked.

I could say it had all been a joke, or deny I had ever seen him before. But once the cops listened, they'd begin to dig and I didn't want that.

The main thing was not even to give them the idea.

Fred stood straighter now. "If I don't get the hundred I'll have to sleep on a park bench tonight. I might get picked up and cops

make me so nervous I talk a lot."

And so I gave Fred his first hundred.

He gets it every week now. Sometimes by check, because since Fay and I got married we do a lot of traveling.

It's always a hundred. No more, no less. Maybe he's smart that way. For only a hundred a week I don't get any drastic ideas.

It just shows the way drinking can cost you. You get into a situation like that where you have to pay a faking runt like that.

Not that liquor doesn't help sometimes. It did the other time. I don't think I would have had the nerve otherwise or even considered the idea if I hadn't had too much to drink.

Maybe that's why I don't have nightmares about it.

Charley did an awful lot of clawing and screaming before I finally managed to throw him off that cliff.



Short Story

London police were recently looking for an itchy thief. Maurice Cheepen had reported that someone stole his 40-flea circus.

Alibis Absolute

Police in Austin, Texas, made a futile effort to find a witness to the tavern fight which ended in the slaying of Gabriel C. Guerra, 22. Lt. Merle Wells reported: "There must have been 50 people in the tavern, but they all said they were in the restroom."